Union Station
Jackson Place and Illinois Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IND-65
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. IND-65

UNION STATION

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Location: Jackson Place and Illinois Street, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

Present Owner and Occupant: Indianapolis Union Railway Company

Present Use: Railroad Station

Statement of Significance: The station is an excellent example of the American Romanesque Revival style of architecture strongly influenced by the work of H. H. Richardson. The exterior is unusual in the skillful combining of brick and granite. The building is an important landmark in Indianapolis, and its barrel-vaulted main waiting room is one of the finest large-scale public spaces in the city.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: The station building was completed on 17 Sept. 1888 and the iron train shed adjoining it within a few weeks following ("In the New Station," Indianapolis Journal, 17 Sept. 1888, p. 8). The station building underwent a major remodeling 1913-1914 ("Remodeled Station Will be a Work of Art," Indianapolis Star, 12 Jan. 1913, p. 5; "Model Union Station...", The Sunday Sun, 28 Dec. 1913, p. 3). A new train shed and concourse, replacing the former iron train shed, was built 1916-1922 ("Track Elevation in Full Blast," Indianapolis Star, 23 July 1916, Magazine Section, p. 3; "Indianapolis Modern Union Station...," Indianapolis Star, 8 Oct. 1922, pp. 13, 22).

2. Architects: The working drawings of the 1888 building are signed "Thomas Rodd, Engineer and Architect, Pittsburgh, Pa.," and most of the sheets are dated 28 July 1886. The roof plan, however, is dated 1887 (Blueprints of the architects' working drawings for the Union Station, at office of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates, Indianapolis.)

The 1913-1914 remodeling of the station was designed by D. A. Bohlen and Son, architects, Indianapolis (Working drawings for the 1913-1914 remodeling of the station building are at the office of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates).

The architects for the 1916-1922 train shed and concourse were McLanahan & Bencher of Philadelphia ("Indianapolis Modern Union Station...," Indianapolis Star, 8 Oct. 1922, pp. 13, 22).

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3. Original and subsequent owners: The Union Station--the station building--lies on the city block bounded on the west by South Illinois Street, on the north by Jackson Place, and on the east by McCrea Street. The south portion of the building lies on a strip of land that was formerly West Louisiana Street. The City of Indianapolis, Journal of the Common Council, Board of Aldermen and Joint Conventions of Said Bodies for the Year 1886, Indianapolis, 1887, p. 462, records petitions by the Indianapolis Union Railway Company for the vacating of this portion of West Louisiana Street. The station is the property of the Indianapolis Union Railway Company.

The present train shed lies on the site of an earlier union station built in 1852-1853 (Wylie J. Daniels, "The Village at the End of the Road," booklet, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1938, pp. 99-100).

4. Builder or contractor: For station and its remodeling: Not known. For present train shed: Marion County Construction Company for concrete work. Kelter Elliott Company of Chicago for steel erection and MClintic Marshall Construction Company of Pittsburgh, steel fabricators. ("Track Elevation...", Indianapolis Star, 23 July 1916, Magazine Section, p. 3).

5. Original plan and construction: The union station replaced an earlier union station on the site of the train shed, but the newer station covers more land, part of which was made available by the vacating of city streets ordered 15 June 1886 (Jacob Piatt Dunn, Greater Indianapolis, Chicago, 1910, Vol. I, p. 263). The exterior walls are of masonry bearing wall construction, rock-faced gray granite and red pressed brick (Ernest P. Bicknell, Indianapolis Illustrated, Indianapolis, 1893, pp. 195-197). The blueprints of the working drawings show the first-floor floor system partly of concrete poured over flat arches formed of corrugated metal resting on iron girders and partly of wood joists on iron girders. The upper-level floors are of wood joists on iron girders. The construction of the entire roof system is of timber, including the trusses which span the main waiting room. The train shed, which connected to the south wall of the station building, was of iron construction. Reports give its size differently as 300 feet by 700 feet, 300 feet by 650 feet, and 189 feet by 740 feet (Bicknell, Indianapolis Illustrated, pp. 196-197; Industries of Indianapolis, published under the auspices of the Indianapolis Board of Trade, Chicago & Indianapolis, 1889, p. 15; Dunn, Greater Indianapolis, p. 263). The shed was lit from the sides and from skylights (Bicknell, Indianapolis Illustrated, p. 196). A photograph

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published in 1889 shows the station, the train shed, and the Illinois Street underpass beneath the shed (Indianapolis Illustrated, H.R. Page Co., 1889, Part 2). In the usual nineteenth-century fashion, the station building and the train shed were conceived as two separate, unrelated buildings, and quite likely were viewed this way also.

The plan of the station is essentially symmetrical about both axes. At the ground level the barrel-vaulted waiting room rising to the full three-story height of the station extended from the main entrance at the north to the train shed at the south. At the east and west sides of the waiting rooms there are rooms at a mezzanine and at the second floor level overlooking the waiting room. There is a balcony at the second floor. The third-floor rooms are at the level of the vault, which was lit from above by skylights and from each end by rose windows, all glazed in colored glass. At the ground floor, the ticket area was atethe northwest corner, the men's waiting room at the northeast corner, the women's waiting room at the southwest corner, and a dining room at tthe southeast corner. There were also a barber shop, a check room, a news stand, a telegraph office, and several toilet and retiring rooms. The three upper floors were used for railway offices ("Remodeled Station Will Be a Work of Art," Indianapolis Star, 12 Jan. 1913, p. 5; Bicknell, Indianapolis Illustrated, 1893). In the cellar the building had its own heating plant and electric generators for its lights ("In the New Station," Indianapolis Journal, 17 Sept. 1888, p. 8; Indianapolis News, 17 Sept. 1888, p. 1).

6. Alterations and additions: In 1913-1914, the station was remodeled, taking advantage of space in the basement made available by the fact that in 1908 the railway had constructed a separate power plant east of the station, thus permitting removal of the boilers and generators that formerly occupied the station basement. In 1913-1914 the southeast and southwest corner rooms were opened up to connect to the main waiting room so that the resulting space was T-shaped in plan. Dining facilities were moved to the northeast corner. In the cellar, there were placed a barber shop, women's waiting room, toilets, and at the southwest corner, an "Immigrants' Waiting Room" with its own toilets. At the main entrance on the north a canopy was added for protection from the weather. On the balcony of the main waiting room, indirect lighting was installed to bring out the frescoes and architectural effect of the vaulted ceiling at night; and direct lighting by clusters of tungsten lights was placed under the balcony ("Remodeled Station...", Indianapolis Star, 12 Jan. 1913, p. 5; "Model Union Station...", The Sunday Sun, 28 Dec. 1913, p. 3; "Old

Landmarks Are to Disappear...", Indianapolis News, 27 July 1912, p. 12; Working drawings for 1913-1914 remodeling of Union Station). IND 49-IND 20

Since the Indianapolis station was a through station and not a terminal, the station was situated at the side of the tracks, of which there were twelve in 1912, and the passengers boarding trains or leaving them had to walk across intervening tracks to get to the station unless their train was on the northernmost track. Frequently, trains were standing on the intervening tracks. Normally, long trains were uncoupled into two portions to provide a way for people to pass across them, but in winter the couplers and the hose connections often froze, preventing decoupling and forcing people to climb up the steps on one side of such a train and down the steps on the other side. Just as the trains interfered with pedestrian traffic within the train shed, the heavily traveled railroad tracks interfered with normal city street traffic, although a few viaducts and tunnels were built. Therefore, plans were made in 1912 for a system of elevated tracks in the central zone of the city which would prevent railroad traffic from interfering with cross traffic both in the train shed and in the city. In Oct. 1915, the track elevation work was begun and by July 1916 the footings for the train shed were being constructed ("Track Elevation...", Indianapolis Star, 23 July 1916, Magazine Section, p. 3). On 1 August 1918, the first train ran on the elevated tracks and passengers reached the train platform by means of temporary stairs. At this time, there wasno superstructure above the tracks and platforms ("First train on Elevated Tracks", Indianapolis Daily Times, 1 Aug. 1918, p. 6; "Elevated Tracks at Union Station In Use", Indianapolis News, 30 July 1918, p. 4). Late in 1922, the new train shed and concourse were completed, having been delayed by World War.I. A newspaper article written near the time of completion says, "No particular type of architecture was carried in the construction." Several photographs are included. Today, the style would probably be considered Expressionist. The new train shed roof covered seven acres in which there were twelve passenger and two freight tracks ("Indianapolis Modern Union Station...", Indianapolis Star, 8 Oct. 1922, pp. 13, 22). There was a concourse at ground level, beneath the tracks. Six stairways gave passengers access to six platforms above, from each of which two tracks could be reached without the necessity of walking across any intervening train tracks. Six freight elevators connected to two tunnels at cellar level which similarly interconnected luggage, mail, and express handling facilities ("Old Landmarks Are to Disappear...", Indianapolis News, 27 July 1912, p. 12).

The station building is currently threatened with destruction and a committee of citizens is actively attempting to save it and secure its preservation as a historic landmark. At the present time, there is virtually no passenger traffic on the railroads serving Indianapolis. IND 49 IND 20.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Building:

1847 The first railroad reached Indianapolis in the fall of that year, connecting the city with Madison, Indiana (Edward A. Leary, Indianapolis, the Story of a City, Indianapolis and New York, 1970, p. 64).

1850 On 1 April, the Common Council passed an ordinance authorizing the construction of union tracks. In May, the Union Track Railway was organized and construction was started. On 19 June, the union track connected four railroads. The site for a union station was selected by a Joint Committee--the north half of Square 96, bounded on the north by West Louisiana Street, on the east by South Meridian Street, and on the west by South Illinois Street. There was public objection to the site because it was considered to be too far from Washington Street, the center of town (Wylie J. Daniels, "The Village at the End of the Road" (booklet), Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1938, pp. 99-100).

1852 Construction of the station was begun. The foundation was stone, the walls brick, and the roof was shingled and "supported by a little forest of timber", making the one-story depot very dark. It cost $30,000 and had five passenger tracks inside and two freight tracks outside to the north. General Thomas Armstrong was the engineer in charge (Daniels, "The Village..." p. 100). He conceived the idea of union tracks and a union depot, drew the plans, and superintended the construction (B.R. Sulgrove, History of Indianapolis and Marion County, Philadelphia. 1884, p. 320). There is disagreement on the size of the original building; dimensions of 120 feet by 420 feet and 100 feet by 420 feet are given (W.R. Holloway, Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, Indianapolis, 1870; Daniels, "The Village...", p. 100). In addition to General Morris, persons active in promoting the union track and the union station were Oliver H. Smith, Chauncey Rose, and E.J. Peck (Holloway, Indianapolis, p. 334).

1853 The station was opened on 30 Sept. and was the first union depot in the United States (Leary, Indianapolis, p. 69; Sulgrove, History of Indianapolis, p. 302).

1855 By this time eight railroad lines were using the depot

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(Emma Lou Thornborough, Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880, Indianapolis, 1965, p. 333).

1864 Thomas Edison was a second-class telegraph operator at the Western Union office in Indianapolis for three months after November. He was seventeen and a half years old (Matthew Josephson, Edison, a Biography, New York, 1959, pp. 45, 51). It is probable that the office was in the union station. A plaque said to have been in the present building commemorated his working in Indianapolis.

1866 The original depot was enlarged by a two-story addition 48 feet wide, on the south side. This is the old depot remembered today (Daniels, "The Village", p. 100). John Curzon, a native of Derby, England, is given as the architect of the union station, but it is not clear if the 1853-1854 building is meant or the 1866 addition (Clifton J. Phillips, Indiana in Transition. The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1888-1920, Indianapolis, 1968, p. 568). The railway offices were transferred to the new portion (Holloway, "Indianapolis", p. 334). It seems probable that Curzon was responsible for the 1866 addition, since it was probably more architectural in nature according to nineteenth-century ideas and since Morris is so completely credited with all aspects of design and construction of the 1852-1853 building.

Again, dimensions given do not agree. Another source gives the increased width of the station as 80 feet, not 48 as mentioned (Holloway, Indianapolis, p. 334).

1877 A belt railway was built connecting all tracks entering the city, one of the first in the country. Originally, the belt line was built for the union stockyards, but in 1882, it was leased to the Indianapolis Union Railway Company, an organization formed to represent the city's railraods and to conduct switching and transfer operations for them, although most of the capital was furnished jointly by the Pennsylvania and the New York Central Systems (Phillips, Indiana, p. 251). In 1884, the belt line nearly encircled the city (Sulgrove, History, pp. 17-18).

1882 Current from the new Indianapolis Light and Power Company central station operated the first electric lights in the station on 12 January (Leary, Indianapolis, pp. 143-144).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Bohlen, D.A., & Son, architects. Remodeling of Union Station. Working drawings, dated 1912. In possession of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson,and Associates, Inc., Indianapolis.

Rodd, Thomas, architect and engineer. Working drawings of Union Station. Blueprints. Most dated 28 July 1886. In possession of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates, Inc., Indianapolis.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Bicknell, Ernest P. Indianapolis Illustrated. Indianapolis, 1893.

City of Indianapolis. Journal of the Common Council, Board of Aldermen, and Joint Conventions of Said Bodies for the Year 1886. Indianapolis, 1887.

Daniels, Wylie J. "The Village at the End of the Road". Booklet. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1938.

Dunn, Jacob Piatt. Greater Indianapolis. Chicago, 1910.

"Elevated Tracks at Union Station in Use", Indianapolis News, 30 July, 1918, p. 4.

"First Train on Elevated Tracks", Indianapolis Daily Times, 1 Aug. 1918, p. 6.

Holloway, W.R. Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, Indianapolis, 1870.

"Improvements at Station", Indianapolis News, 29 July 1909, p. 8.

"In the New Station", Indianapolis Journal, 17 Sept. 1888, p. 8.

Indianapolis Illustrated. H.R. Page Company, 1889.

"Indianapolis Modern Union Station...", Indianapolis Star, 8 Oct. 1922, pp. 13, 22.

Indianapolis News, 17 Sept. 1888, p. 1.

Industries of Indianapolis. published under the auspices of the Indianapolis Board of Trade. Chicago & Indianapolis, 1889.

Josephson, Matthew. Edison, A Biography. New York, 1959.

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Leary, Edward A. Indianapolis, The Story of a City. Indianapolis and New York, 1970.

"Model Union Station...", The Sunday Sun, 28 Dec. 1913, p. 3.

"Old Landmarks Are to Disappear...", Indianapolis News, 27 July 1912, p. 12.

Phillips, Clifton J. Indiana In Transition. The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920. Indianapolis, 1968.

"Remodeled Station Will Be a Work of Art", Indianapolis Star, 12 Jan. 1913, p. 5.

Sulgrove, B.R. History of Indianapolis and Marion County. Philadelphia, 1884.

Thornborough, Emma Lou. Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880, Indianapolis, 1965.

"Track Elevation Work at Full Blast", Indianapolis Star, 23 July 1916, Magazine Section, p. 3.

"Union Station to Have Improvements Costing $3,000,000", Indianapolis Star, 19 Aug. 1911, pp. 1-2.

D. Likely sources not yet investigated: Old documents of the Indianapolis Railway Company were to be transferred late in 1981 to the State Archives in the Indiana State Library and Historical Building in Indianapolis.

Prepared by Wesley I. Shank
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Iowa State University
August 1971

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Union Station is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival Style of architecture in America. It is a well-scaled and equally well-detailed building. The terminal building was designed by Thomas Rodd and built from 1886 or 1887 to 1888. The monumental barrel-vaulted waiting room is one of the finest large-scale public spaces in Indianapolis.

2. Condition of fabric: It appears to be in excellent structural condition; however, many of the interior and some of the exterior surfaces have been poorly maintained.

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B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: c. 145' x 145'. Number of bays: Five distinct units compose the facade (the north elevation). Number of stories: Three. Layout, shape: Rectangular.

2. Foundations: Five foot high heavily rusticated base of dark reddish stone that has weathered to an almost black patina.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: The brick walls are laid in common bond and have a red-orange patina.

4. Structural system, framing: The major spaces of the first floor are supported by flat brick arches carried by inverted iron "T"'s and are supported by iron beams and/or massive stone bearing walls. Some of the small areas of the first floor are carried by wood joists.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: A marquee defines the central three bays of the north elevation; it has a deep (c. 1'-0") copper fascia. This is not a part of the original construction since it is not to be seen in photographs taken around the turn of the twentieth century. It was probably added in the 1920's. A modest concrete stoop is located on the east elevation.

6. Chimneys: One brick interior chimney on the east elevation can be experienced from the ground. It has a brick corbeled cap. The chimney appears to have round corners.

7. Openings:

Doorways and doors: The main entrance consists of three pairs of wooden doors with large fixed lights. Brass kick plates almost 3'-0" define the lower parts of all these doors. A massive round brass push rod, horizontally mounted and almost the full width of the door, lines up with the top of the brass plate. The main doors open into a vestibule 12'-0", the wainscot is marble and the upper walls and ceiling are wood paneled.

Windows and shutters: The majority of the first floor window openings are expressed as semi-circular brick arches. The original windows and frames have been replaced by glass block to an elevation about 1'-0" below the spring line of the arches. The area above the glass block has been closed with brick.

The wooden double-hung windows at the second floor are painted green.

The double-hung windows of wooden construction at the third story have semi-circular heads.

Two fine stained-glass wheel windows define the north and south elevations of the building. They have a radiating geometric pattern of green, amber, and off-white glass. They appear to be in excellent condition. IND 49 IND 20.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A series of intersecting gables and hipped elements define corner pavilions. The material is slate.

b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is stone.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Major brick tower at northeast corner of building is square in cross-section with a series of decorative brick revetments above the clock faces. The corners are defined by semicircular tourelles with conical caps. The main tower is capped with a polyfoil spire that is covered with slate.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Basement: Front half (north) of basement consists of public toilets, etc.; Men's Rooms on the left (east), and Women's Rooms on the right (west). Each public facility has large waiting rooms. Behind the men's toilet facilities in the southwest corner of the basement was an area referred to as Emigran'ts Waiting Room and toilets for men and women. This space is now used for storage and employee's rest area. The remaining basement spaces are used for mechanical equipment and storage.

First floor: The main waiting room is three stories in height c. 46'-0" wide (east-west dimension) and c. 130'-0" long (north-south dimension). It is defined by a banded barrel vault which spans the short (east-west) dimension. The waiting room defines the central longitudinal axis of the building and the main entrance from the street is on the north end of the vaulted space.

On the left side (east side) of the waiting room are a series of spaces from front to rear (north to south) consisting of a dining room, lunch room (two stories in height), kitchen, and a series of smaller shops. All of these spaces have been vacated except for two small shopss at the at the southeast corner of the main waiting room. These shops were originally a two story high waiting room.

On the right side (west side) at the northwest corner are telephone booths, the ticket windows and offices,

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and a Women's waiting room. At the southwest corner adjacent to the main three storied waiting room is a secondary waiting room two stories in height with a freestanding coffee bar of more recent construction.

Second floor: The main waiting room penetrates the second level. On the left (east side) of the waiting room are the upper parts of the dining room and lunch room and what was a small bakery over the first floor kitchen. These spaces have been closed.

The spaces above the small shops are not usable since the shops have low (furred) ceilings. This space was originally a two storied waiting room (cf. First floor description). The corresponding space to the right side (west) of the main waiting room is the upper part of the existing waiting room (southwest corner of building). A series of small administrative offices are located on the west side of the main waiting room.

Third floor: A balcony defines the main waiting room. On the left (east) balcony are a series of offices which have been unoccupied for at least several years. These were the offices of the New York Central, Pennsylvania Railroad, etc. Adjacent to the right balcony (west side of the main waiting room) are a series of offices at the northwest corner of the building, the offices of the Indianapolis Union Railway Company. The former Pullman offices at the southwest corner of the building have been vacted.

2. Stairways: Open well two flight stairways have marble treads and risers with open decorative iron balusters and iron handrails.

3. Flooring: Basement: Concrete in all areas except toilet and waiting spaces, the latter have ceramic tile. First floor: Main waiting room floor is terrazzo. The field is grey and the strips about 1'-6" wide have a scroll design of green and red terrazzo. The flooring in the adjacent areas is of a variety of types all added over the original flooring.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Basement: Mechanical equipment spaces have rough faced stone and brick walls with exposed brick arch ceilings and exposed iron beams. Walls and ceilings in what was the Emigrant space are plastered. First floor: Marble wainscot at piers of main waiting room. Piers are faced with pilasters and are a part of a Roman arched order expression. The caps of each pilaster have a different geometric design. The balcony is cantilevered from the walls and carried by a

series of scroll type brackets. The balcony is defined by a finely detailed open iron balustrade. The banded barrel vault is of plaster and painted tan in color. Second floor and third floor: Walls are ship lap car siding with plaster ceilings. Many spaces have been remodeled and have a "modern" appearance.

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5. Doorways and doors: Wood panel doors with glass lights. Frames of wood.

6. Special decoratives features, trim and cabinet work: The most distinctive elements are the two stained glass wheel windows which penetrate the north and south walls of the main waiting room. The windows are about 20'-0" in diameter and are glazed with green, amber and off white stained glass.

   A series of five stained glass skylights in the barrel vault have a similar patina. Each unit is about six feet square.

7. Notable hardware: Most of the hardware is simple late 19th century or has been replaced with 20th century elements.

8. Mechanical equipment: Heating: Steam supplied from the city's central heating system. Lighting: Modern electric. Plumbing: Modern.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main elevation (facade) is the north elevation and faces Jackson Place. The west elevation is parallel to Illiniois Street and the east elevation is defined by McCrea Street. The rear or south elevation is defined by the elevated tracks of railroad. Thus the perimeter is defined by concrete walks.

Prepared by David R. Hermansen
Ball State University
April 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative porject in 1970 between the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and the Historic American Buildings Survey. During this project, nine buildings in Indianapolis were measured and drawn, and sixteen more were recorded with professional photographs and written data.

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The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects under the direction of Professor David R. Hermansen of Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Professor Wesley Shank of Iowa State University prepared the historical data, and Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. H. Roll McLaughlin, FAIA, State Preservation Coordinator, President of the Historic Landmarks Foundation, and member of the HABS Advisory Board, served as consultant throughout the project.